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### Deposited in DRO:

17 February 2015

### Version of attached file:

Accepted Version

### Peer-review status of attached file:

Peer-reviewed

### Citation for published item:

Miles-Watson, Jonathan (2012) 'The cathedral on the ridge and the implicit mythology of the Shimla hills.', Suomen antropologi : journal of the Finnish anthropological society., 37 (4). pp. 30-46.

### Further information on publisher's website:

<http://www.antropologinenseura.fi/en/journal/>

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## **The Cathedral on the Ridge and the Implicit Mythology of the Shimla Hills**

Jonathan Miles-Watson

### **ABSTRACT**

This paper engages Lévi-Strauss' notion of implicit myth with data drawn from extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Shimla. Shimla is located in the Indian Himalayas and today exists in an obvious relationship with its past, when it was known as Simla, the summer capital of British India. Christ Church Cathedral stands at the heart of both colonial Simla and postcolonial Shimla (both literally and metaphorically). The implicit mythology of this sacred place forms the centre of this paper through acting as a sort of key myth around which the rest of the discussion spirals. The paper explores the way that places in Shimla become sacred and why it is that these places are often associated with stability and peace, despite bearing traces of violent change. I will argue that central to uncovering this mystery is the concept of implicit mythology, which has the potential to unlock many of the mysteries posed by postcolonial anthropology.

**Keywords:** Implicit Mythology, Structuralism, Lévi-Strauss, India, Sacred Space

Lévi-Strauss' important contribution to the analysis of explicit mythology is well recognised, yet his interpretation of implicit mythology is less commonly discussed. There is, however, a small, but significant, body of literature that points to the promise of the idea (Galinier 2004, Houseman 1998, Hugh-Jones 1988, *et al*). Drawing inspirationally on this body of work I revisited Lévi-Strauss' concept of implicit mythology and found within it the seed of an idea that when fully developed has proved extremely useful for interpreting my own field research. In what follows I will demonstrate how the concept of implicit mythology can be usefully developed through both embracing its generality and honing its specificity. I will also draw upon my ethnographic research in North India (2006, 2009, and 2012) as a case study for highlighting the continuing utility of the concept. Through this I will demonstrate that the idea of implicit mythology helps to highlight the contribution to civil society that is made by Shimla's Christian communities. Viewing this contribution through the lens of implicit mythology will be shown to be a useful way of moving the discussion of India's Christians away from the dominant Dumontian framework of caste (Bayly 1981, Mosse 1996, Robinson 1998, *et al*), as well as representing more accurately the way that ordinary Shimlites reckon with sacred and secular environments.

The concept of implicit mythology can be traced back to Lévi-Strauss' brief mention of the existence of a more disjointed type of mythology that often accompanies ritual action (1981 [1971]: 668-669, 1996 [1991]: 83). Lévi-Strauss likens it to an edited collection of essays rather than a monograph (1981: 669). By which he means to suggest that implicit mythology lacks the cohesiveness of explicit mythology, yet alike to explicit mythology it still represents a series of reflections on (and answers to) a central logical problem. However, I am not convinced that implicit myth is more fragmented than explicit mythology, in fact I want to suggest that by its very nature implicit mythology represents a more cohesive, holistic and grounded answer to these issues than explicit mythology alone. This is because implicit mythology is by nature contextually situated and deals directly with the problems involved in navigating the world. I also do not follow Lévi-Strauss in conceiving of implicit mythology as something that is entirely rational and therefore outside of the realm of the emotions (1981: 668). Emotion, as I will demonstrate, is central to the reception and development of powerful implicit mythologies. Finally, while I want to follow Lévi-Strauss' suggestion that implicit mythology and explicit mythology should be seen as structurally cohesive, I do not follow him in believing that implicit mythology is best understood outside of the realm of devotional action and ritual.

These differences, arise fundamentally from a disagreement with Lévi-Strauss' notion of structure. Lévi-Strauss imagines that structure is reflective of the way that the brain organises the chaotic sense data that it is bombarded with (Lévi-Strauss 1973). This belief leads him to posit that structure lies not in the world so much as in the hardwiring of the brain (*ibid*). This idea pervades most of Lévi-Strauss' thought, however, it is accidental, rather than essential to Lévi-Strauss' concept of implicit mythology and can be altered without the concept losing its utility (Miles-Watson 2009). Indeed, the potency and value of the concept of implicit mythology dramatically increases once it is freed from the limitations of Lévi-Strauss' cognitive model. For, if we do not so much construct meaning out of a chaotic world as move along with a world of meaning (Ingold 2000: 98), then implicit mythology, anchored as it is to that movement through (and action within) the world, can reveal localised ecologies of being. In this understanding implicit mythology then is not a subsidiary category of explicit mythology; rather it is the other way around: explicit mythology forms a subsidiary category of implicit mythology.

Implicit mythology, for the purpose of this article, will be defined as the narrativization that both accompanies and contextualises ritual action, as well as being the trace of that ritual action. Moreover, I take implicit mythology to be operating wherever there is material and action that is tumescent with meaning. Implicit mythology can therefore also be taken to mean art and architecture, as well as being found in activities like hunting and praying. This is because, just as explicit mythology can refer to at once something specific and something general, so too can implicit mythology. This ability of implicit mythology to blur the boundaries of being makes it a powerful tool for accurately reflecting the way that specific and general understandings interweave in people's daily life. In other words, just as we can talk about the myth of Oedipus and Greek myth, so too we can talk about the implicit mythology surrounding a particular set of ritual actions and the implicit mythology of the temple within which the actions are performed. This reflects the way that these levels of understanding cohesively fuse in experiential reality.

My development of the concept of implicit mythology draws inspiration from the work of Edmund Leach, who utilised explicit mythology, ritual narrative and religious material culture equally in his structural analyses (Hugh-Jones and Laidlaw 2000: 83). For all its problems, 'Pulleyar and the Lord Buddha' (1962) remains an excellent example of the way these seemingly distinct categories are profitably rolled together in Leach's analysis. However, an even more direct inspiration for this paper is the work of Stephen Hugh-Jones (1988) and Christine Hugh-Jones (1979), whose Straussian analyses of the Barasana begins to open many similar possibilities. The opening of the potential of the category of implicit mythology can be clearly seen in Stephen Hugh-Jones' summary of his and his wife's now classic analyses of Barasana culture: 'in addition to the more usual topics of ethnographic enquiry, we therefore paid particular attention to knowledge about the natural world, animals, plants, stars and seasons, and to the kind of 'implicit mythology' that is revealed in such things as hunting, fishing, gardening and food preparation, eating arrangements and manufacturing processes, as well as in ritual and ceremony' (1988: 14). In this description the concept of implicit mythology spreads out of its explicit ritual context to give meaning to a wide range of activities and actions, some of them directive, others consequential. And one of the most striking things about this work is its elucidation of the central role of architecture

and how village life, myth and ritual are anchored around key buildings. Life in my own field site, the Himalayan hill station of Shimla, was also anchored around certain sacred buildings. These places acted as a sort of key myth for solving a logical problem posed by the changing tides of colonialism, postcoloniality and globalization (Miles-Watson 2013).

One important consequence of considering religious practice in contemporary India as implicit mythology is a stressing of the importance of sacred landscapes: landscapes that are both constituted by ritual action and shaped by the trace of past ritual action. It is common to think of religion as increasingly dislocated from place. Not only do we now have religious expression increasingly operating through cyberspace, but we also live in a world that seemingly has increasingly substantial rates of population and information flow. Not to mention the often heard and debated suggestion that religion is becoming more privatized, retreating from public spaces, where freed from regulation it can morph into more individualized spirituality (Luhmann 1982). While in some places, for some people, religious practice is undoubtedly finding fresh ways of being that suggest a churchless faith (Guest 2007, Jamieson 2002), at the same time as this is occurring we can also see a trend towards the emplacement of religious identity (Eck 2010, Sheldrake 2002, Kunin 2009). What is more, the importance of place has been a reoccurring theme of my own research with faith groups, who have consistently highlighted that their faith is a source of relationships: relationships with both human and non-human people, the animate and the inanimate. This is clearly the sort of ecology of sacred landscapes that the concept of implicit mythology speaks to.

### *Shimla and Simla*

Shimla, the state capital of Himachal Pradesh, is a migrant city of around 175,000 people, over half of whom are classed as being a floating population (Chandramuli 2011: 47). It is the home of the state government and the state university, as well as a wide selection of service and retail industries. Shimla is, in many ways, a hypermodern city (Coleman and Crang 2002: 1). When I lived in Shimla (2006, 2008-2009, 2012) a walk along its central mall would take me past such well known international brands as Domino's Pizza, Subway and the United

Colours of Benetton. Behind these globally recognisable brands however lies a particular socio-historical set of processes and local variations of more widely spread capitalist rationality. For, as both Lefebvre (1976: 21) and Harvey (1996: 31) have noted, capitalism's processes need to be spatialized in order to be understood. Indeed, like many people, I have built up relations both within and with these postmodern landscapes. Like many of those who frequent the mall, when I think of Shimla's Domino's restaurant I think of both my own historical engagement with this space and the narratives that I have heard of other people's engagement. My image and memory of the place is both very particular and very personal. Shimla is full of people who have come to know such places in similar, all-be-it unique ways.

Shimla's sites of postmodern capitalism are clearly places that relationships weave and knot around as people flow through the city. Moreover, they are also places with an obvious history that stretches back beyond the living and captures something of the actions and desires of those who are now dead. One of the reasons that so many tourists flow into Shimla each summer is the perceptible presence of colonial history among these hypermodern spaces. For, Domino's Pizza, United Colours of Benetton and their like sit within the black and white mock Tudor buildings that Shimla is famous for. Although the city was renamed Shimla in 1983, as part of a pan-national project, old Simla (as this city was once called) still proudly proclaims its past. Indeed, many local residents will still refer to what they see as the meaningful parts of the city by the old name of Simla.

The mountains that the city today has moulded itself around were until comparatively recently a rural area, marked, or so it is said, only by the existence of local shrines. As the early nineteenth century progressed, the deodar covered slopes became an increasingly popular place for hunting and healing (Kanwar 2003: 16). By the middle of the nineteenth century a sizeable hill station had developed serving largely the needs of Europeans in India (*ibid*). This was part of a wider trend for the establishment of hill stations in colonised countries (Kennedy 1996: 1-2). Hill stations were designed to provide a place for those who were European, or of European ancestry, to retreat to (*ibid*). They were specifically intended to be landscapes that generated resonances with places in Europe that Europeans associated with home (*ibid*).

The hills were an obvious choice for such places, for they provided a natural environment and climate that had more parallels with those of Northern Europe than the plains. This sentiment is wonderfully captured by the Welsh travel writer Fanny Parkes, who when writing of her first experience of the Indian Himalayas in the mid-nineteenth century declared 'how delicious is this coldness in the Hills! – It is just as wet, windy, and wretched as in England!' (Kennedy1996: 51). Of course the weather in hill stations, with the seasonal monsoon, was dramatically different to that of England and although it was common for British writers to describe the deodar covered slopes as just like the forested slopes of Scotland, they are clearly not the same. For our purposes it is important to note that the colonial elite of India saw something in the geography of hill stations that they connected with the imagined geography of their nominal homeland. This connection was further cemented by naming places within the hill stations after places from their perceived homeland. A walk through Shimla today still takes you past Annandale, Stirling and Strawberry Hill. The connections that the natural world offered were furthered through the construction of homes and public buildings that aimed at emulating Tudor, or Gothic European constructions. In Simla this process culminated in the building of a Vice-Regal lodge, which was constructed after Simla had become the summer capital of the Indian subcontinent. The imposing building was constructed at the behest of Lord Dufferin between 1885 and 1888 and is said to draw inspiration from Balmoral in Scotland (Kanwar 2003: 52-53).

It may seem logical that in the postcolonial period these colonial places increasingly lost their value. As the old colonials who needed these places to connect with the land of their ancestors drifted away and new people from all around India entered the city to make it their home it is easy to imagine that landscapes designed to ape Balmoral would become obsolete. However, these grand colonial buildings were not simply bulldozed to be replaced by modern, utilitarian constructions. For sure, some of the retail operations within the central mall changed, but others remained and crucially the public and religious buildings retained both their form and (at least to some extent) their function. The modern city of Shimla is a place where the trace of the past is very present and demands integration into the lives of its contemporary residents. This provokes contemporary Shimlites to grapple with questions about nationhood, identity and belonging: How is old Simla, reconciled with new Shimla? How can the past in a modern city be integrated with the present? The answer to these



questions lies at the heart of the city in the nexus of implicit myths that knot around the site of Christ Church Cathedral.

### *The Cathedral on the Ridge: Out of Place Sacred Space*

When in 2006 I first came to Shimla, like most visitors, I was instantly struck by (and drawn to) Christ Church Cathedral. Even before reaching the city Christ Church Cathedral was clearly visible crowning the ridge of Shimla. Later that day I wrote in my field journal that Christ Church had first appeared to me to resemble 'a church sat on top of a wedding cake'. Once the cart road was left behind and the lower bazaar navigated, I wound upwards along the largely pedestrianized central mall, past the mock Tudor buildings, housing modern retail outlets selling everything from locally specific products to globally recognisable branded goods. I periodically paused to catch my breath in the thin mountain air and raised my eyes above the rooftops to the ever changing vision of Christ Church Cathedral. Different elements of the building revealed themselves through the softly falling snow as my path turned from one side to the other, until finally I reached the top and came face to face with the building. Over the years I came to Christ Church Cathedral from different places at different times of the day and during different seasons. On each occasion the building revealed something new about itself. Sometimes it would appear like a lighthouse in the mist, at other times it sparkled in the sun, sometimes it was in dialogue with the mall, yet at others with Jakhoo forest, which holds (hidden within) Hanuman's temple. Sometimes Christ Church Cathedral was full of noise and life, yet at others it was still and possessed of great peace. After a year in Shimla I wrote in my field journal that 'despite its changing nature one constant feature of Christ Church Cathedral is its centrality – it is as if the rest of the city spirals around it'.

In both the *Raw and the Cooked* (1994: 1-3) and *From Honey to Ashes* (1983: 30-47) Lévi-Strauss suggests that a Structuralist analysis should begin by locating a 'key myth'. This 'key myth' then forms the start of the analysis, which subsequently spirals out to incorporate new material that both is best understood in relation to the key myth and helps to further unlock the key myth's mysteries (*ibid*). Christ Church Cathedral is in many ways the key myth of this article, but it is not, as Lévi-Strauss suggests, simply an arbitrary starting point that



reflects the analyst's logic (1994: 1-2) , rather it is the sacred place around which the implicit mythology, which unlocks the mysteries of the wider landscape, knots and weaves. For, in thinking of Christ Church Cathedral as the geographical and mythological centre of Shimla, I am far from alone.

During my first two period of fieldwork in Shimla (2006-2007; 2009-2010), Christ Church Cathedral was undoubtedly the city's most striking landmark: its yellow Gothic tower, like a beacon consistently called people to it. Most of the visitors to Shimla that I spoke to during these times reported that upon arrival in Shimla they would make for Christ Church Cathedral. Once there they would take a photograph of it, or have a photograph taken with them stood outside, for only then would they feel that they had truly arrived in Shimla. Similarly, many local residents would regularly walk the mall until they came to Christ Church Cathedral where they would stop to enjoy the air and view before walking home. Christ Church Cathedral had clearly become synonymous with Shimla and it was no surprise that when the Facebook group 'Simla', which at the time of writing has over 170,000 members, came to choose its online avatar it chose an image of Christ Church Cathedral.

The building that people today flow steadily around was first constructed under the supervision of Colonel Boileau in 1844 and was designed to evoke the spirit of a typical English Parish Church (Buck 1925: 118). It was originally the Anglican Church in Shimla and the place where the Viceroy and surrounding dignitaries would worship (*ibid*). Those dignitaries and their descendants are now gone and it would be reasonable to presume that this place had lost its importance, or had to radically transform its function. In the postcolonial, postmodern, capital of Shimla, it may seem logical that the central function of Christ Church Cathedral has evaporated as the city's population transformed. Yet, Christ Church Cathedral is still geographically and mythologically central - it is the mystery of this that makes it the ideal key for unlocking the wider mysteries of Shimla's implicit mythology.

Today Christ Church Cathedral is part of the Church of North India (CNI), a loose Protestant coalition of churches that was established in 1970 (Davis and Conway 2008: 136). Christ Church Cathedral is an active place of worship that continues to hold two regular services a week, with additional services and events at special times. The congregation that I came to

know there were divided in their views on the way forward for the church and drawn from a range of backgrounds. Many of them were immigrants from other areas and most had a strong attachment to Shimla. In a recent survey carried out by Usha Chung, 150 people self-identified as being a member of the congregation (2000: 135). In my experience this figure is somewhat higher than that at regular services and considerably lower than the number of people at special services and events. It is also a figure that does not account for the many people who are involved with Christ Church Cathedral but do not self-identify as congregants (even though they may be found within the congregation).

Many local Hindus and Sikhs are no strangers to Christ Church Cathedral, many attended church services there as children and many as adults can be found at special services, such as those that occur around Christmas (Miles-Watson 2013). This childhood connection with Christ Church Cathedral in many cases extends from either attending or knowing someone who attended one of the three elite CNI schools that exist in Shimla (Bishop Cotton's School, Auckland House and St Thomas' School). Children at these schools are regularly exposed to CNI worship during their schooling and through this they become part of the life of the cathedral. An education at Bishop Cotton's School, or Auckland House, is associated less with formally belonging to the Christian faith than with being a member of the Indian upper middle class (Chung 2000: 136). Chung found that the majority of Christians who self-identified as belonging to Christ Church Cathedral also self-identified as being middle class (Chung 2000: 135). This also fits with my own, more recent, experiences at Christ Church Cathedral. The most popular forms of employment for Shimla's urban Christians are the civil service and education, although a sizeable minority at Christ Church Cathedral (around ten percent) are comparatively wealthy land owners (*ibid*: 135-140). The vast majority of the adult congregation are university graduates and around forty percent hold postgraduate degrees (*ibid*: 141).

Most of Christ Church Cathedral's Christians were born into the faith and it is therefore not as surprising as it may at first seem that the majority of them are uncomfortable with the idea of conversion (Chung 2000: 199-200). During my time in Shimla I saw this manifested in the way that certain members of the congregation were unsettled by the presence of converts from a different social background and with a different level of education. During focus

groups I pushed this issue further and learned that this discomfort stemmed from a belief that these groups lacked the skill to properly reckon with a Christian sacred environment. They were viewed as not being sufficiently aware of the history and tradition of worshiping in a place like Christ Church Cathedral, which it was suggested led them to behave inappropriately. In other words, they were viewed as lacking sufficient fluency in the implicit mythology necessary to imaginatively enter into the mythical ritual field and creatively engage in the generation and maintenance of wider implicit mythology. The issue however is not one of simply enskilment, or of learning the implicit mythology necessary to become a harmonious member of the congregation. For, in a largely migrant city, such as Shimla, most people have to learn the implicit mythology of the church as adults in order to successfully blend into the weave of the sacred space. Rather, such judgements are a statement of belief that people from certain socio-economic backgrounds are either unwilling, or unable, to master the required implicit mythology.<sup>1</sup>

### *Implicit Mythology and Ritual Action*

When I first wound my way up the central mall and entered Christ Church Cathedral my eyes were drawn to elements that I could recognise: the crucifix shape, the pews clearly designed for prayer, the noticeable altar and the chancel window (depicting scenes from familiar biblical passages). I therefore began to interpret both the space and how to properly engage with it through reference to similar sacred spaces that I had a history of engagement with elsewhere. However, I had little knowledge of the particular history of this sacred space and how it was used today. Over the years I came to know that specific history through members of the Cathedral's kind sharing of folk memories of the place. Oftentimes someone who I was in conversation with would point out certain features of the cathedral that were relevant to the general topic of the conversation and therefore my attention to the trace of past historical action in this place. Because of this process, today, when my eyes roam around Christ Church Cathedral, I no longer simply see universal patterns of architecture, for I also now see the

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<sup>1</sup> Although this is a general trend, there are notable exceptions: throughout my fieldwork one of the ministers at Christ Church Cathedral was a charismatic convert to Christianity who had gathered around him precisely the kind of Christian converts that may be viewed as marginalized. Interestingly these converts often preferred to worship at satellite churches outside of the main city rather than at Christ Church Cathedral itself.

particular histories that have resulted in Christ Church Cathedral's contemporary form. Through attending worship in Christ Church Cathedral I increasingly became skilled in the practice of observing the trace of certain past historical action in the present sacred space. Therefore, when I look today at the chancel window I do not simply see it as a depiction of particular biblical scene, set for abstract architectural reasons in a particular place; rather I associate it with a particular set of historical events and particular historical characters. In this I am not alone, conversations with the many migrant members of the congregation revealed a similar journey to my own.

Both the ability to reckon with the church environment that I arrived with and that which I subsequently developed, may be seen as two subcategories of the kind of implicit mythology that Lévi-Strauss suggests accompanies ritual action (1981: 668-669). The first kind, which I will term 'standardised implicit mythology', refers to a widely held international understanding of Christian rituals in general, whereas the second, which I shall term 'vernacular implicit mythology', refers specifically to historical ritual and devotional action that has occurred within Christ Church Cathedral itself. Vernacular implicit mythology is in keeping with Lévi-Strauss' examples from small scale societies, whereas the standardised implicit mythology is a logical development of Lévi-Strauss' thought when applied to an international religious organisation. While I think it is useful to think of these skills as related elements of implicit mythology, I would not follow Lévi-Strauss in suggesting that this makes these processes of enskilment somehow less substantial than so called explicit mythology. There is also a third kind of narrativization that surrounds Christ Church Cathedral, this is a form of implicit mythology that contextualises both the sacred space and the action that unfolds there. This 'reflexive implicit mythology' is even more personal and powerful than the two types of implicit mythology that I have discussed so far and pushes the concept of implicit mythology beyond the constraints of Lévi-Strauss' thought.

The first service that I ever attended at Christ Church Cathedral generated within me immediately a sense of being at home. This may have had something to do with elements of worship that in a strange place reminded of me of the country of my birth, which is England. These somewhat familiar elements included the traditional form and decoration of the church and the relationship of the service and hymns to those found in the Book of Common Prayer.

Of course the service was also quite different to anything that I had encountered before, for one thing Hindi was used at times and for another there was a large proportion of Hindus and Sikhs present during worship. I wrote in my field journal that I had experienced 'an alluring blending of the familiar and the strange'. Over the intervening years I developed a rather different appreciation of worship at Christ Church Cathedral.

When today I think of worship at Christ Church I think of it entirely in terms of the familiar and in a way that is both deeply personal and tied to my own sense of self. The people in the congregation are now no longer simply demographics to me, rather they are individuals, who I know well and with whom I share many collective memories and understandings. Clearly, my own sense of self is now connected to that place and when I talk to people about the church I can see a similar line of development in their own understandings. When a long standing member of the congregation worships at Christ Church Cathedral they do so in a way that is filled with memories and emotions. They do not simply perceive the trace of historical, sacred, action, for they also perceive the trace of their own historical sacred action and that of known individuals. The analysis of reflexive implicit mythology therefore demands, despite Lévi-Strauss' recommendations to the contrary (1981: 668), that the analyst engage with the messy realm of emotions.

We are now in a position to understand how Christ Church Cathedral, at least for some contemporary Shimlites, is the key to resolving the tensions of the colonial past and the postcolonial present. When the church organist sits at the nineteenth century pipe organ to play, he remembers past occasions on which he played, while simultaneously being aware that he is only the latest in a long line of people to sit at this organ and play this song. Indeed, he is so aware of these past elements that when he plays today he often feels the ghost of an old colonial pianist playing along with him, sometimes sounding extra notes and adding to the resonance of the composition. Quite clearly, despite the suggestion in landscape theory (Palang, Printsmann and Sooväli 2007) that massive population movement leads to ruptures in the landscape of worship and the trend in the anthropology of Christianity to view Christian institutions as rupturing agents (Engelke and Tomlinson 2007), Shimla's Christians anchor themselves in the past of the city through the church, even though most cannot claim to have families that worshiped at the church before independence. Thus, the church neither

becomes a separated history, nor a dead space; rather, the processes of modernity and migration heighten the importance of the church as an anchoring device and situate it as the arena within which space can be transformed into place (De Certeau 1984: 117).

Christ Church Cathedral is the arena for social anchoring through historical rupture because emotionally charged, reflexive implicit mythology, is interwoven with vernacular implicit mythology, thus blending the memories of the individual with the collective memories of the landscape in a satisfying way. Of course, the contemporary Christian does not experience these as separate categories in the way that I have displayed them here, rather they engage with Christ Church Cathedral in a way that effortlessly weaves the standardised, vernacular and reflexive implicit mythologies just as they continue to weave the implicit mythology of the building by continuously engaging in devotional practices that further alter the mythic landscape. Here, somewhat ironically, the utility of the term implicit mythology becomes manifest: the unity that the term conjures accurately captures the way that emotion, place, memory and space are unified in the lived experience of any individual. What is more, as the next section will demonstrate, the term also has the ability to bridge from the sphere of the individual to that of the collective, wherein the individual actors themselves become part of the myth.

The discussion so far has highlighted that at the centre of our mythic spiral stands Christ Church Cathedral. It is a site of powerful implicit mythology, which operates at three levels in the lives of many of Shimla's Christians: the global, the local and the personal. Yet, Shimla's Christians are a minority group, who can hardly claim to be representative of the overall population, we therefore still have to solve the mystery of how our key site of implicit mythology can unlock the wider mystery of the city. In order to do this I intend to summon evidence from the ghosts of Shimla, who can be found throughout the city as well as within Christ Church Cathedral. Shimla is full of ghosts, as are many hill stations in India, and people are always ready to discuss them. Shimla's ghosts range from corporeal manifestations to more abstract yet equally experientially real agents (Chaudhry 2005). In the autumn of 2009 I was walking along the central mall while discussing ghosts with a retired mathematics professor, when he remarked that the ghosts were all around us right now. "Really", I replied, "you can see the ghosts now?". "Of course", he shot back, while gesturing

to the mock Tudor Gaiety theatre. I realised that although we were using the English term ghost in our conversation my interpretation of ghost was far narrower than my informant's understanding. He was using the term in a way that was similar to that implied by the local word for both apparitions and the past, which is *bhoot*. Ghosts for Shimlites are therefore more obviously relatable to spatial memory than they are for many Europeans and perhaps not surprisingly, most of Shimla's ghosts are British.

### *Widening The Spiral: Worshiping With Ghosts*

I have been fortunate enough to learn from an elderly, Hindu, resident of Shimla how ghosts have surrounded their life and their engagement with both Christ Church Cathedral and the wider town. I am extremely grateful for the generous sharing of this important information, which in anonymized and summarised form provides the basis for the next movement of this analysis. For, this Hindu chronological narrativization of the presence of ghosts in and around the sacred Christian cathedral, demonstrates not only how alive a sort of polytropy is in Shimla (Carrithers 2000), but also points to the way that Christ Church Cathedral operates as a key for quietening the disquiet of Shimla's general landscape. Although the chronology of the narrativization is retrospective rather than drawn from a longitudinal study the chronology of the events as presented is valuable as an idealised account that is reflective of the informant's structuring of their own history. This structure highlights the transformative abilities of implicit mythology enskilment and the way that entering imaginatively into weave of these mythologies answers wider questions of nationhood, identity and belonging.

I remember as a child being drawn to Christ Church Cathedral. I would look up at it from the lower bazaar and think how wonderful it looked. Yet, whenever I expressed my desire to visit Christ Church my grandparents would rebuke me saying that I should not travel up there, because the ghosts of Britishers<sup>2</sup> could be found there. These ghosts were said to be very violent and to dislike Indians: if they caught you they would cut off the top of your head and hang you upside down. Despite my grandparents' warnings I did not stay away from the cathedral and I would join a group of children who would venture up to Christ Church to play a game around the outside the building. We would play at the front, where it juts out in a covered square. The game was called four corners and we enjoyed being up there, outside the cathedral,

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<sup>2</sup> Britishers is a local term for people from Great Britain or those of British descent.



playing this game, it made us feel as though it was also somehow our church. But when it started getting dark we would nervously hurry down the hill. I remember thinking that it was best not to stay too close to Christ Church after dark because the ghost of an English woman, who had died inside the church, haunted the place and she would get angry if children were too noisy or rowdy near the church, if they disturbed her rest.

This narrativization of a young Hindu's interaction with Christ Church Cathedral is clearly a kind of reflexive implicit myth, for it relates to actions undertaken around a sacred space and while that action is not strictly speaking ritual action it is surrounded by ritualistic features. Perhaps more importantly, these stories act as a pre-myth for the main implicit mythology that follows by creating dramatic tension. When the narrator encounters the cathedral as a youth then Christ Church appears as a strange place, yet one that has to be reckoned with. The young Shimla resident is inescapably, almost against their will, drawn towards it. The place is a paradox at once central to her landscape and yet also a place of secrets and taboo. What is more, as the grandparents warn, this is not only an alien place but a place of unreasonable aggression and perilous danger. The problem that the landscape presents and that the mythology will play with is set. It is a problem that still potentially exists today: how does this imposing colonial, Christian, landscape relate to the life of a postcolonial Hindu?

An attempt to resolve this problem is found in the second movement of the reflexive implicit mythology. Here we see an attempt to claim the sacred central space represented by Christ Church Cathedral. This attempt involves interlacing personal memories of childhood games around the outside of the building yet this resolution is only partial and the place is still one fraught with danger and hostility, all be it now of a slightly more reasonable kind. For, a second ghost now emerges that of the easily irritated female Britisher. Although she is less antagonistic than the head cleavers she is still nevertheless hardly welcoming, especially as she seems to view the young Indian's engagement with the space as inappropriate. I have also learned, from a young Anglo-Indian Christian, a complimentary myth, which states that this ghost was an English lady organist who loved to play so much that she was in the church playing on a bitterly cold evening. Then suddenly, in the middle of playing, she died of the cold. It was too cold for a proper funeral at the graveyard and so she was buried in the backyard. But this woman returned to the church as a spirit and would continue to play. Several contemporary congregants have related to me that you can hear the ghost practicing

when the doors are locked and I have been informed that sometimes when the organist today plays she plays along with him. This related narrativization from a distinct personal set (or group of sets) shows a different understanding of the ghosts that is perhaps to be expected from Christians. However, remarkably, in the second narrativization of their life's engagement with the space and its ghosts our original Hindu resident arrives at a similar understanding.

I did my schooling at Auckland House and [during this time] regularly attended morning services at the Cathedral. The first time that I entered into the church it was a revelation of beauty, it was so peaceful to be there and be part of the worship. When I spent more time in the church it became more familiar and I came to know of all the people who had worshiped there before and who worshiped there now and how they only wanted to do good things. To be honest, I became a bit angry with myself, I felt a bit foolish for having thought of it as a place of harm and danger. It certainly did not seem that way anymore. When we sang I liked to imagine the ghosts of the former choir girls singing along with us and that made me feel happy. One day the priest talked to us about a stained glass window [the chancel window], designed by Lockwood Kipling, the father of Rudyard Kipling, whose poems I knew well by then. I remember thinking that I was singing hymns in front of a window designed by Lockwood Kipling just as his son, Rudyard Kipling, must have done - that felt good.

In this second narrativization we move within the church and clearly into the realm of both reflexive implicit mythology and vernacular implicit mythology. Indeed, although directly absent from the narrative the account indirectly also suggests a familiarity with relevant elements of standardised implicit mythology. This narrative also shows the resolution to the problem posed by the first narrativization. Through increasing familiarity with the implicit mythology of the space it is transformed from a foreboding realm of alterity into a comfortable and familiar realm. The ghosts have now moved from being violent, to being angry, to being reassuring presences and all this is achieved without conversion or the compromising of a Hindu, Indian identity. The completeness of this sense of fusion and its relevance for wider Shimla life is brought out in a final narrative.

When after over a decade living outside of Shimla I returned there, I immediately went towards Christ Church Cathedral. I did this because after so long away I wanted to feel connected with the city once more. It seemed to have changed quite a bit, there were new shops and stalls on the lower bazaar and mall and the whole place seemed busier than I remembered. I wanted to see something that had not changed, that I could relate to now as I had done as

a child and I thought that Christ Church Cathedral would be the place for that. At first I could not see it clearly, there were too many crowds of people in the way, but I found my way through to ladies' park and standing there I looked up and saw it again, just like I looked at it as a child. And I remembered everything: my childhood days playing there, the fear of the ghost in the back, singing in the choir as a child and how Lockwood Kipling had designed the chancel window, even my Grandmother's tales about the spirits of violent Britishers - I knew then that I had come home.

In this final narrativization, which in many ways reflects the informant's current view of their own relationship to Christ Church Cathedral, the degree to which the implicit mythology has become internalised (and part of their identity) is clear. It is also clear that through this process the implicit mythology of Christ Church Cathedral has become a key for understanding the wider landscape of Shimla. When taken together, these narratives show a movement in the chronology of implicit mythology. In both the ghost stories of grandparents and the given habitus of birth, Christ Church Cathedral is clearly the realm of the other:

Christ Church : Unreasonable Violence : Alterity :: Lower Bazaar : Safety : Home  

$$\begin{matrix} A & & - & & B \end{matrix}$$

This suggests an underlying structure of negative qualitative valence, which can be transcribed as  $A - B$ , or,  $A/B$  (Lévi-Strauss 1983: 9). As the narrative progresses the youth tries to reckon with their environment and this has some success in rehabilitating the place, but the resolution is clearly incomplete:

Christ Church : Reasonable Violence : Somewhat Familiar :: Lower Bazaar : Safety : Home  

$$\begin{matrix} A & & - & & B \end{matrix}$$

These implicit myths are clearly possess a more mediated structure, yet the underlying equation is still oppositional ( $A - B$ ). However by the final set of narrativizations a transformation has occurred, which results in category overlap between the world of the lower bazaar and that of the ridge. This effectively habilitates the ridge by overcoming the difference between the colonial Christian and the postcolonial Hindu worlds:

Christ Church : Timeless Peace (Safety) : Home :: Lower Bazaar : Safety : Home  

$$\begin{matrix} A & & + & & B. \end{matrix}$$

By exploring the nexus of relations that wind around Christ Church Cathedral through the concept of implicit mythology, we are able to see the way that personal and historical

accounts can be similarly woven together in the lives of both Christian and Hindu residents. This suggests that the binary categories of Hindu and Christian, colonial and postcolonial, at least in this context, are of limited use. In reality we see people existing along a continuum that cuts across faith and time and relates to the level of the individual's engagement with the implicit mythology of the place. The accounts that I have presented are representative of people who have a reasonably high degree of engagement, but they are by no means isolated cases. In Shimla I lived embedded within a middle class Hindu community and my neighbours were extremely proud of Christ Church Cathedral, which they considered to be as much their church as that of the Christians. Although I have here only presented one case study I have over the years been fortunate enough to receive many more narrativizations of childhood experiences at Christ Church Cathedral. Indeed, this was the case with every long term resident of Shimla that I have ever encountered. Many Hindus, even as adults, still attend Christmas services (Miles-Watson 2013) and it is hard to find anyone in Shimla who will suggest that the church is not central to the life of the town; it is central, partly because of its location, but also because it reinforces and creates a connection with the past through the implicit mythology of the church landscape.

### *Implicit Mythology and Historical Trauma*

It is a widely commented (Eliade 1963, Griffiths 1982, Malinowski 1926, *et al*) feature of mythology that it folds historical time, trans-historical time and present action together. By inviting participation in a symbolic truth it elevates the individual from the realm of time-bound, limited life, into communion with seemingly eternal communally held truths (Griffiths 1982). This is indeed the process that seems to be at work in the implicit mythology that I have explored, which further suggests the value of considering this material as a form of mythology. Moreover, we have seen that implicit mythology is remarkably robust and has the capacity to obviate the traumas of history in a way that is reminiscent of how both Eliade (1963) suggests mythology in general functions and Lévi-Strauss suggests a certain type of structuring mythology, known as 'cold', operates. However, Lévi-Strauss' thought is perhaps more subtly and reflexive than that of Eliade, for he implies that so called history is also a form of structured mythology, albeit one that is the opposite of 'cold', which is to say that it

is 'hot'. The notion of 'hot' and 'cold' cultures, like that of implicit mythology, is an area of Lévi-Strauss work that he tantalisingly raises without fully developing (1977: 28-29). However, unlike the concept of implicit mythology the idea of 'hot' and 'cold' cultures has captured the imagination of Lévi-Strauss' critics, who in their hurry to condemn the concept often seem to miss its potential (Hugh-Jones 1988: 139). Lévi-Strauss stresses that these types are ideal rather than actual, yet it is broadly possible to say that a 'cold' culture is one which is like a small clockwork device: it has systems in place which enable it to resist entropy (1969: 33). Whereas a 'hot' culture, in contrast, is said to be like a steam engine: it constructs a presentist myth which incorporates a linear sense of progression (*ibid*). This is no doubt what Lévi-Strauss has in mind when he says that the myths of the Americas act in such a way as to annul the effects of time (1994: 16, 1981: 606). They contain within them systems which act as shock absorbers for the changes brought about by historical analysis and allow for time to be focussed on the present (1966: 68-69).

This theory, while in itself controversial, is quite different to the crude evolutionism often attributed to Lévi-Strauss. Lévi-Strauss himself states that the Structuralist 'should not draw a distinction between societies with no history and societies which have histories... [for] every human society has a history' (1969: 39). Furthermore, the idea of 'coldness', of resistance to entropy, does not apply to the supposed state of a society's myths but rather to the way that the myths function (Gow 2001: 127). Thus Lévi-Strauss does not claim, as is often supposed, that the myths are somehow frozen and resistant to change: rather they resist change by being dynamic and open to historical events. Indeed, as Gow has noted, based upon Lévi-Strauss' writings the last thing we would expect of myths is self-identical reproduction over time; 'instead, we would expect them to be marked by extreme openness and lability' (*ibid*).

It seems that Lévi-Strauss may have seen in the Amazonian explicit mythologies that he was familiar with a way of dealing with the traumas of history that has resonance with the Himalayan implicit mythology that we have been exploring. For, the implicit mythology of Christ Church Cathedral has the ability to overcome the traumas of history, not by remaining static but precisely by being open and incorporating the trace of historical action. It is precisely the visibility of the trace of personal and non-personal histories that gives Christ

Church its ability to heal the ruptures of colonialism, postcolonialism and globalization. We have seen how amidst all of the flux of Shimla, Christ Church Cathedral can be an anchor that is associated with both personal history (home) and timeless peace. The reason for this sense of stability and timelessness, this ability to obviate the traumas of history, was precisely the sacred space's ability to display the traces of historical trauma and historical action that the implicit mythology directs attention towards.

### *Working with Implicit Mythology*

In this article I have demonstrated that Lévi-Strauss' much maligned theory of implicit mythology holds within it the inspirational seeds of an increasingly relevant analytic tool. For, as globalization increases and population movement intensifies, sacred spaces will increasingly find themselves in the same position as that of Shimla' Christ Church. Whether traditional sacred spaces become non-places (Auge 1995), or places of profound value, in this modern age may well increasingly depend on whether the implicit mythology that surrounds them is part of a wider 'hot', or 'cold', structuring system.

It is clear that Lévi-Strauss' basic supposition, regarding the connectedness of the structure of mythology and implicit mythology, still rings true. Indeed, as Lévi-Strauss suggests, this article has been able to explore implicit mythology without an in-depth discussion of the accompanying ritual, which while valuable in its own right is not always necessary. For sure, the article has used personal and social contextualisation in order to analyse the implicit mythology, yet this is only following Lévi-Strauss' general directive for the analyst to always begin by placing themselves at the heart of the culture under consideration, because without ethnographic understanding the study of mythology is ineffective (1994: 1-3). However, during his discussion of implicit mythology, Lévi-Strauss seems to go too far in marginalising the relation between mythology, action and emotion. I have here solved this problem by adding the subcategory of reflexive implicit mythology to his theory, which has proved to be a key tool in solving the structural puzzle presented by any given set of implicit myths. This subdivision of implicit mythology also allows the analyst to avoid the danger of having so general a category that it is of little empirical use. For sure, the concept of implicit

mythology is encompassing and this is its strength, yet it need not be its weakness: by exploring subtypes of implicit mythology we are able to maintain the sense of an overarching framework while introducing some sort of precision into the concept.

By viewing the ethnographic mystery presented by Shimla's Christians from the perspective of implicit mythology we have been able to go beyond the dominant discussions of caste, spatial economics and political rupture. This has opened a door into the answers that Shimla holds for the modern globalizing world and allowed for a more experiential understanding of certain aspects of the religious life of a key group of Shimla's residents. Here Lévi-Strauss' complementary notion of 'cold' cultures has also proved a useful way of abstracting the mysteries that our exploration of implicit mythology unveiled and this paves the way for other comparative explorations. It is clear that when some of the seemingly most abstract and least popular elements of Lévi-Strauss' thought are engaged with the messy reality of ethnographic research, in the modern migrant city, they prove to be inspirationally valuable tools, whose usefulness is only heightened by contemporary social developments.

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